

Yersiniosis

What is yersiniosis?

Yersiniosis is a bacterial disease that generally affects the intestinal tract. It is a relatively uncommon disease and usually occurs as a single isolated event. Occasional outbreaks have been reported due to a common exposure.

Is it a new disease?

No. The germs that cause yersiniosis have been around for many years. Only in recent years has it been recognized as an important, although uncommon, infection. Because it is uncommon, many laboratories do not routinely perform the specific tests needed to identify it.

Who gets it?

Any person can get yersiniosis but it occurs more often in children.

How is it spread?

The *Yersinia* germ is spread by eating or drinking contaminated food or water or by contact with an infected person or animal.

What are the symptoms?

Infected people may experience mild or severe diarrhea, fever and abdominal cramps. Sometimes *Yersinia* infection may mimic appendicitis.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms generally appear three to seven days after exposure.

Where are the *Yersinia* germs found?

Animals are the main source of *Yersinia*. Fecal wastes from animals (particularly pigs) may contaminate water, milk and foods and become a source of infection for people or other animals. The germ has been found in pork chitterlings, raw milk, lakes and streams, ice cream, improperly pasteurized chocolate milk, tofu, shellfish and wild and domestic animals.

How long can an infected person carry the germ?

The germ is passed in the feces during the time the person is experiencing diarrhea and in some cases for a few weeks or months afterward. For this reason, infected people must be very careful to thoroughly wash their hands after each toilet visit.

How is yersiniosis treated?

Most cases recover on their own without treatment. Those with severe symptoms or bloodstream infections are generally treated with antibiotics.

How can yersiniosis be prevented?

Avoid drinking raw milk and improperly treated surface water. Use appropriate precautions when handling meat products so as to avoid cross contamination from raw foods to cooked or ready-to-eat foods. Thoroughly wash food contact surfaces and hands before and after food preparation.

Revised: May 2004